

# *Tohu va Vohu*

*Hebrew College presents paintings by*

JOSHUA MEYER



# תהו ובהו

## *Tobu vaVobu: Hebrew College presents paintings by* JOSHUA MEYER

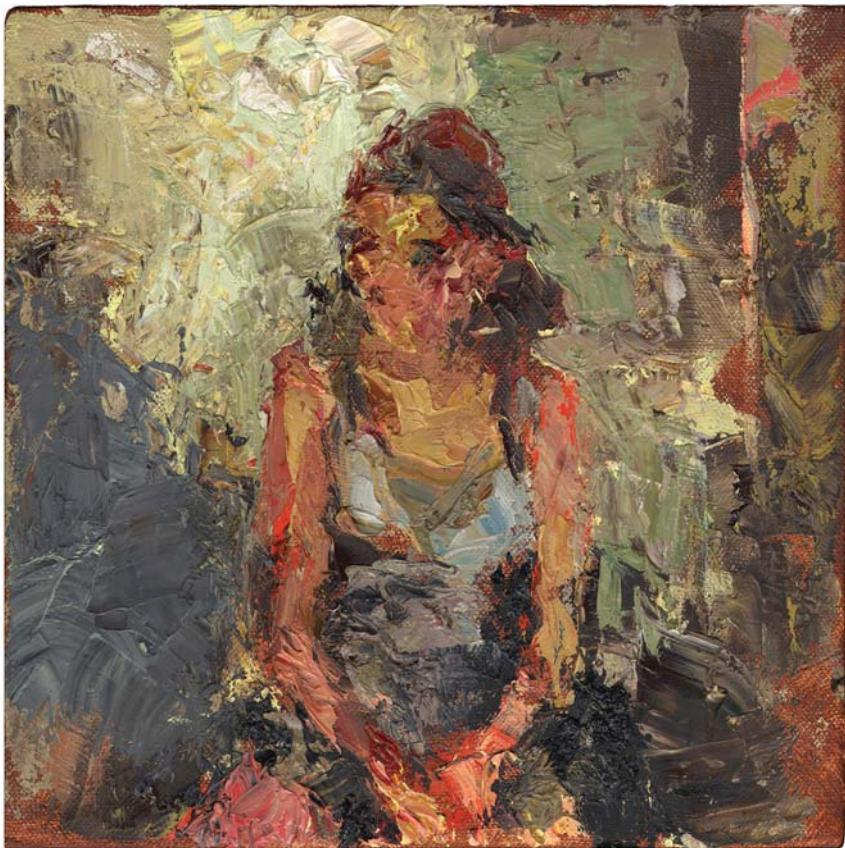
The Goldman Gallery at Hebrew College  
June 6–October 15, 2004

I leave my paintings' surfaces raw and open so that you can see how they were made—how the images emerge over time. Each painting tells its own history through its layers, marks and revisions. Like the biblical creation story, I am telling you more than "And then there was man." The whole process of making is recounted sequentially.

I first met my God in Genesis, as a creator. This narrative is the most eloquent description of the creative process because it so closely parallels my own joys and frustrations making art. The stepping back and evaluating, the gradual building, the way that God makes things by creating in pairs—defining by juxtaposition—light only makes sense next to dark. All of this rings very true to my own simpler exercises in defining and creating.

*Tobu vavobu* is where God begins. In the second line of the Torah, from the story of creation, we learn about the biblical primordial goo: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void." In spite of it being undefined and all but unlimited, the earth encompasses all of creation outside of heaven. The world precedes its own form, so *tobu vavobu* contains infinite possibility. The remaining days of creation are about drawing distinctions and creating relationships.

Gray is the painter's equivalent of *tobu vavobu*. Within the range of gray there are more subtle variations than any other color, because it is the one that contains all others. The more you mix



8 x 8 inches, oil on canvas

into it, the grayer it becomes. It leans this way and that—brownish, bluish—but messy, inescapable gray refuses to be pinned down and named as a proper color.

Yet segmenting and organizing within this chaotic gray is itself the process of creation. The chaos grows into form, refining and defining, building relationships. The colors—and ultimately images—finally emerge when various grays are juxtaposed. New color relationships build new meanings, and language emerges, veering from chaos to form and back into chaos. Colors and forms struggle with each other in a quest for clarity and meaning.

Creation, for the painter, becomes the process of separating out and distinguishing between the different grays; creation is the transformation of the infinite into finite relationships. Gray is the way we visualize the magnitude of possibility.

—Joshua Meyer, 2004

**J**oshua Meyer's paintings—the products of his work—do not allow us to take our leave from them. As Rilke describes in his letters on Cezanne—art can seize and change us. The colors and textures, the marks, the strokes, and the aura of his commanding visions reflect something of the nuance and variation, alluring and questioning quality of existence.

"But even more significant is Joshua's devotionally trenchant, insistent and uncompromising giving himself over—with courageously searching honesty—to the process by which his works emerge, trail off, wander, get lost, experiment and reemerge.

"This young master-artist also is a genuine intellectual—one who knows how to give the intellect a rest, but also loves what it wants to offer. Consequently, he engages fateful questions concerning the character of art and of Judaism, their possibilities, challenges and problems.

"Today half of everyone and their cousins are writers and the other half are artists, but—as in every field of endeavor—there are only thirty-six, forty-nine at most, who are engaged in work of genuine value. Joshua Meyer is one of these few."

—Dr. Steven Copeland, Hebrew College

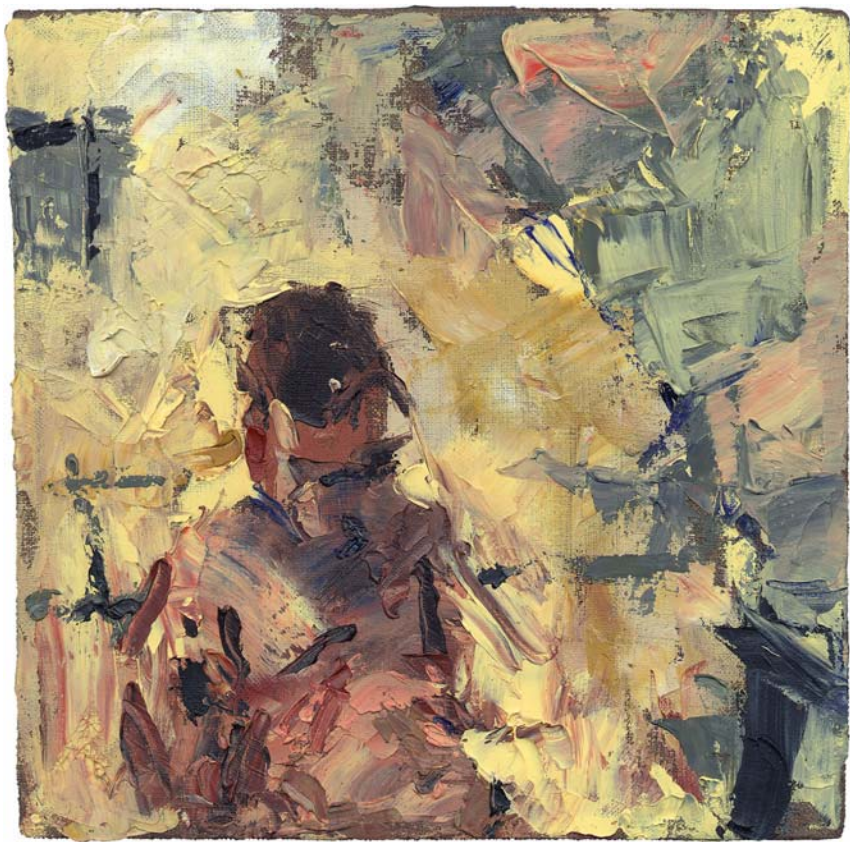




*12 x 12 inches, oil on board*

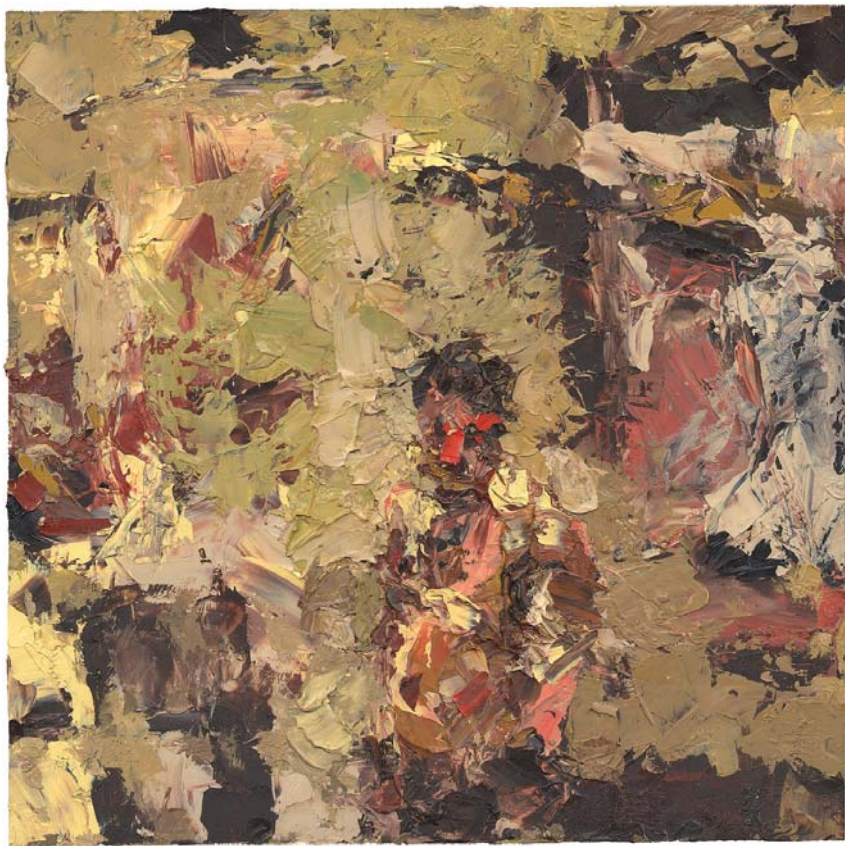


8 x 8 inches, oil on board



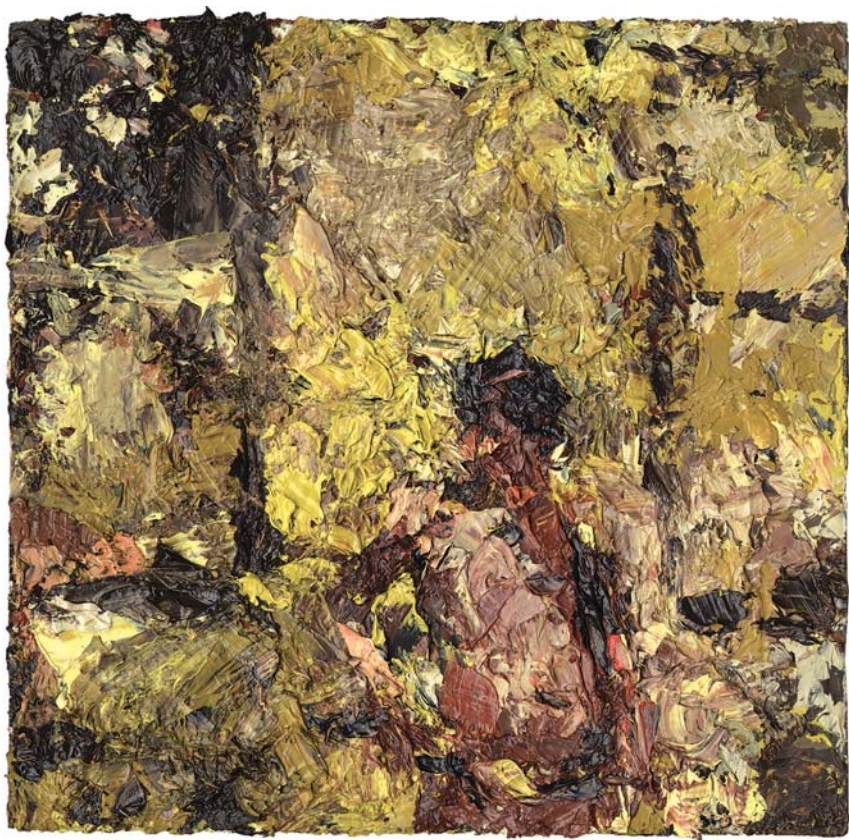
8 x 8 inches, oil on linen





*12 x 12 inches, oil on board*





8 x 8 inches, oil on board



12 x 12 inches, oil on board



8 x 8 inches, oil on board

Aspiring to create the Great American Painting before he turns 40, Joshua Meyer has displayed his luminous works throughout the country, most recently at the San Diego Art Institute and the 38 Cameron Gallery in Cambridge, Mass. A graduate of Yale University and the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem, he has been recognized with numerous awards and honors, including a Bronfman Youth Fellowship in Israel (1991), a Bronfman Yotzma Fellowship (1995) and Trumbull Fine Arts Award (1996). A member of the Berkshire Institute for Music and Arts steering committee and board of directors, Meyer was visiting artist and instructor, with Dr. Steven Copeland, for *Art and the Jewish Experience* at Hebrew College during the spring 2004 semester. By day design director for Hebrew College, Meyer treasures his evenings with his wife, Dr. Michal Skarf, and three-year-old daughter, Liora—and painting late into the night in his Cambridge studio.



8 x 8 inches, oil on board



"Commanding visions," emerge from the midst of Meyer's thickly layered paint, according to Hebrew College Professor Steven Copeland. "He engages...fateful questions concerning the character of art and of Judaism, their possibilities, challenges and problems." While Meyer's paintings have been widely shown, this exhibit explores artistic creation and revelation as a parallel to biblical, divine creation. The 40 paintings on view at Hebrew College, concludes Copeland, "can seize and change us."



"Meyer's surfaces are loaded with paint. They reveal the artistic process while involving the viewer in each artistic decision along the way—whether they know it or not."

—Linda Friedlaender, Yale Center for British Art

"Joshua Meyer engages us with the fleeting details of the quiet spaces in our lives. It is in these small moments that we find ourselves connected to the whole of life."

—Rich McKown, Art New England

"One might think of Meyer's work as a painterly extension of his religious devotion."

—Louis Kaplan, Tufts University

"Surprising and delightful...his are ultimately sensual works, concerned more with conveying the experience of the material world....The paintings read like gentle, inward-looking celebrations of matters tactile and...kinetic."

—Christopher Millis, The Boston Phoenix

